



Biblical Foundations of Coaching

by Robert E. Logan

The Bible never commands us to coach. In fact, the word coach is never used. So why coach? Should we even coach? Is coaching biblical?

The Bible does command us to do certain things: to make disciples, to encourage one another, to listen to the Holy Spirit, to follow what we sense God is calling us to do. Yet in most cases it never tells us *how*. *How* are we to make disciples? Is one method right and another wrong?

Certainly there are some methods that are wrong, all the way from forced discipleship to non-relational discipleship. But generally speaking, God leaves the methodology up to us. Any method that is consistent with the general principles of scripture may be used, provided the end is a biblical one.

Coaching is one such method—and in this case a method that is incredibly consistent with biblical principles.

What is coaching?

Coaching is the process of coming alongside a person or team to help them discover God's agenda for their life and ministry, and then cooperating with the Holy Spirit to see that agenda become a reality. Coaches come alongside to help, just as Barnabas came alongside Paul, and then Paul came alongside Timothy and others. By encouraging and challenging others, coaches empower them for ministry.

The goal of coaching is helping someone succeed. And what is success? It's finding out what God wants you to do and doing it. Ephesians 2:10 says, *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* A person's success is directly tied to finding out what works God has prepared for them to do and then doing that.

Given that definition, success will certainly look different on different people, but following the will of God—in all its varied and colorful forms—is the core calling of a life of faith. Coaching empowers each individual believer to listen to the Spirit and act in accordance with the mission they sense God calling them toward. Coaching is essentially listening to the Spirit and taking action accordingly.

How does coaching align with biblical principles?

- **Coaching assumes that each believer has the capacity to hear from the Holy Spirit for themselves.** The Apostle Paul modeled that listening and discernment process for us:



"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1). We are to respect others enough to assume that they too can hear from the Holy Spirit and do not need us to tell them what to do.

- **Coaching provides a safe environment in which people are actively encouraged to listen to the Holy Spirit.** Set aside time for listening to God has always been a priority for those who believe. *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed"* (Mark 1:35). Just as Jesus spent time listening to the Father, we too need to set aside time and space that will allow us to listen for the voice of God.
- **Coaching provides a way to hear from God in the context of community and relationship.** We weren't designed to go it alone. We need others to bounce our ideas off. Others play a role in our hearing from God: *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Heb 10:24-25).
- **Coaching mirrors the method of Jesus.** Jesus listened and asked questions in the context of relationships, allowing them to draw their own conclusions and act accordingly: *"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God'"* (Matt. 16:13-16).
- **Coaching assumes that God has different plans for different people.** Coaching isn't one-size-fits-all. All plans are tailor made and flexible. What one person is supposed to do isn't necessarily the same as what another person is supposed to do: *"As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, 'Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.'"* (Mark 5:18-19)
- **Coaching moves people toward maturity rather than dependence.** Instead of simply telling people what to do, coaching helps people mature in making their own godly decisions. In this way, they grow in responsibility and in leadership. *"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ."* (Col. 1.28)



- **Coaching provides the accountability for people to move forward into what they have decided to do.** Each person is responsible before God, yet we live in community. Coaching provides an effective way to be in relationship with one another, honoring one another and holding one another accountable. *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another”* (Proverbs 27:17). Coaching is a focused relationship that helps people continue to move forward.
- **Coaching provides an excellent means of living out the “one another” passages of scripture.** Consider how coaching provides an environment for these “one another” commands: love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, be kind and compassionate to one another, speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
- **Coaching helps people stay connected to the vine.** *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me”* (John 15:1-4).

Barnabas, called alongside to help

Let’s look to a biblical example of someone who functioned as a coach: Barnabas. Now, I think Barnabas is one of the most important people in the New Testament, but he gets almost no recognition. He probably wouldn’t even make most people’s top ten list. Yet consider the significance of what Barnabas did.

Originally named Joseph, Barnabas was one of Paul’s closest companions, traveling with him on missionary journeys. Translated literally, Barnabas means “son of encouragement.” Acts 11:23-24 describes Barnabas in this way: *“When he arrived in Antioch and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.”* That’s a great description of a coach: one who is called alongside to encourage, prepare, equip, and help other succeed.

Barnabas often acted as a liaison between people, building bridges to bring them together. After Paul’s conversion, Paul tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they were afraid of him. After all, Paul had a reputation for killing Christians. The disciples—reasonably enough—



thought it was a trap. But Barnabas took Paul and brought him before the disciples, testifying to the genuineness of Paul’s conversion.

Barnabas also brought John Mark back onto the team after John Mark had abandoned Paul and himself on a previous journey. In spite of that history, Barnabas saw potential in John Mark for significant future ministry. Imagine what that must have meant to John Mark to have someone believe in him in spite of his past failures.

This is how we see Barnabas operating as he influenced others relationally and experientially throughout his ministry. Barnabas was a helpful and encouraging person to have around. He was someone who, instead of taking center stage, empowered others. He sponsored in both of these apostles. If we take Paul and Mark out of the equation, how much of the New Testament wouldn’t even be written?

Barnabas may never have been in the starring role, but without him many others would not have been able to accomplish the great things for God that they did. Through his investment in people, his impact was exponential.

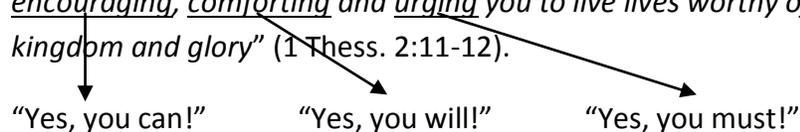
If you really succeed and do your job well as a Barnabas, few people will even know about you. Everyone else will get the credit, but you’ll be the ones who really made a difference by empowering them.

The functions of coaching

We’ll close by looking at two final scripture passages that shed light on coaching—one on how it is done, the other on why it is done. The first passage, 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12, provides a picture of how coaching is done.

The Apostle Paul paints a picture of how we are to develop others in their faith—as a father dealing with his children. The functions a father performs are encouraging, comforting, and urging. These are the core functions of coaching as well.

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:11-12).



*Diagram used by permission of Dennis Easter

The second passage of scripture, Ephesians 4:11-12, sheds light on *why* coaching is done.



“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

The role of a leader is to equip. A good leader doesn't do the work of the ministry for people, but helps them learn to do the work of the ministry. The word *equip* is the same word used in classical Greek to describe the setting of a broken bone. It's used in the gospels to describe the mending of a torn net. Essentially, to equip is to make something functional so it can be used to fulfill its intended purpose. That's what a coach does. In my opinion, coach would make a good modern day translation of the word equip.

What's the result? “The body of Christ being built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Then the process comes full circle as each of us, having been brought to maturity, turn around and equip others as well. Imagine individuals, groups, and whole churches listening to God in the context of community, hearing his voice, and doing what he has for us to do. What might be accomplished for the Kingdom?

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